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ARTICLES:

- (1) Security situation in Afghanistan deteriorating; Japanese aid worker kidnapped; NGOs targets of attacks

The security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. An increasing number of private-sector aid workers have been kidnapped or attacked. The poor security situation in Afghanistan was proven by the abduction on Aug. 26 of Kazuya Ito, 31, of the Peshawar-kai, a reputable Japanese nongovernmental organization conducting aid activities in the country. The incident has spread strong anxiety among aid-related organizations, with some groups having decided to evacuate their Japanese workers evacuate from Afghanistan.

Although the Taliban government collapsed in 2001, Taliban dissidents have been intensifying their activities in the eastern part, where Ito was kidnapped, and the southern part of the country. Civilian victims of battles between the Taliban and government forces and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force have been increasing at a record pace since 2001. Discontent with the long presence of ISAF and growing civilian victims has resulted in a vicious cycle of armed conflicts and terrorist attacks.

Since 2001, the U.S. military, a central player in ISAF, has lost a total of over 500 lives, including 100 this year. On Aug. 18 and 19, Taliban fighters killed 10 French soldiers in fighting near Kabul. The US-led coalition forces seem to be losing lives in Afghanistan at a greater pace than in Iraq. The number of civilian victims is even greater due to errant bomb attacks by ISAF and other eventualities. In fact, the number of civilian lives lost to terrorist attacks and fighting has reportedly increased by 60 PERCENT from last year.

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Aid workers are also vulnerable to armed attacks. Three female aid workers of a U.S.-based NGO, including a Canadian, were gunned down in Logar Province in the central part of the country. After the incident came to light, a Taliban spokesman indicated that the attack was aimed at the aid organization, saying: "(Their) work is not helping Afghan people."

Ito was kidnapped in the eastern province of Nangarhar, an important area with the Jalalabad Highway connecting Kabul and Pakistan running through it. Al Qaeda elements are also reportedly hiding out in tribal areas on the Pakistani side. The fighting between Taliban rebels and ISAF/U.S. military troops is intensifying on the Afghan side.

On July 6, a U.S. air strike mistakenly killed many wedding guests in the eastern Nangarhar province. The area has now become extremely dangerous for foreigners with the surge of anti-U.S. sentiment from the incident.

The kidnapping of Ito added to the anxiety of persons concerned who were already highly alarmed against the trend of growing attacks on and abduction of NGO workers.

The incident has prompted the Association for Aid and Relief, Japan, which has been conducting activities in Kabul, to decide to evacuate its two Japanese workers from the country as early as Aug. 27. "The security situation has rapidly deteriorated since last year. Nobody knows when and where a person will be kidnapped," an association member said.

Many NGOs have taken self-defense measures. The Jalalabad-based Japan International Volunteer Center, for example, withdrew Japanese staffers in January this year and adopted a short-term business-trip system instead.

The refugee-assistance organization JEN also moved its Japanese workers to Pakistan last October and has been making contacts with Afghanistan mainly via email and telephone.

The area in which the Peshawar-kai has been conducting activities is highly dangerous and other NGO workers have rarely visited there. Dotted with U.S. bases, the region was also a center of drug production. The Peshawar-kai has not been attacked owing to its trusting relationship with local residents forged through long years

of activities.

Peshawar-kai head Manji Fukumoto commented: "Local people do not put trust in NGO and UN workers who stay there only for short periods of time. They trust us because we have been there for over 10 years providing finely-tuned assistance to them. Trust is the best security."

Fukumoto also explained the kidnapping's background this way: "Such factors as drought-induced soaring wheat prices and the U.S. military's anti-Taliban operation have caused moral corruption."

The kidnappers' motive is unclear. Keiko Nishigaki of the Takarazuka Afghanistan Friendship Association that is conducting activities in Jalalabad noted: "I cannot quite understand why they suddenly attacked the NGO worker who has been blended in with and respected by local farmers."

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The Japanese government has announced to extend a total of 2 billion dollars (approximately 220 billion yen) in aid to Afghanistan. The aid is specifically for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) project, the disarmament of illegal armed groups (DIAG), the improvement of infrastructure, and support for health and medical services and education. Assistance for building schools through NGOs and technological cooperation by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) are also included in the aid.

The Peshawar-kai to which Ito belongs is being operated with some 300 million yen in membership dues and donations without funding from the Japanese government.

A total of 40 JICA workers are stationed in Kabul and Jalalabad.

In the wake of a string of suicide attacks on foreign troops and kidnappings of foreigners in Afghanistan, the Foreign Ministry has issued an evacuation advisory to Japanese citizens in the country. According to the ministry, there are some 150 Japanese residing in Afghanistan, including government personnel, economic cooperation-connected persons, NGO workers, and media people.

(2) Japan to endorse U.S.-India nuclear agreement

ASAHI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
August 28, 2008

Should Japan endorse support for the peaceful use of nuclear power by India, which possesses nuclear weapons and has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? Pressed for a difficult decision as the sole atomic-bombed country, Japan has finally decided to conditionally endorse the treatment of India as an exception, thinking that it will contribute to measures against global warming and nuclear nonproliferation. India's program also runs the risk of undermining efforts to deal with the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran, shaking international trust in the NPT regime.

Japanese government

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura in a press conference yesterday showed understanding toward India's nuclear power promotion policy, saying: "It will contribute to efforts to combat global warming. (India) is the largest democracy and is a rapidly growing economy. In view of strategic partnership, India's expectations and hope must be accepted honestly."

The government plans to endorse the U.S.-India nuclear cooperation agreement allowing the United States to provide India with nuclear technology and nuclear fuel in the next Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) meeting expected to take place in Vienna on Sept. 4-5. The government is also likely to seek some conditions in order to prevent nuclear power being used for military purposes.

For Japan, as the only atomic-bombed country, maintaining the NPT

regime is a basic policy goal. India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998. In reaction, Japan, along with other international members, fiercely protested, even temporarily suspending yen loans.

India's economy has been rapidly growing as it entered the 21st century. A senior Foreign Ministry official said: "We realized that

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all other countries have lifted their sanctions on India. We have failed to get India to abandon its nuclear weapons program."

The government has recently shifted its policy course, contending that CO2-free nuclear power contributes to curbing global warming. The U.S.-India pact will be followed by an agreement between India and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which will enable the latter to inspect 14 nuclear facilities in the country, instead of six. Machimura indicated that this, too, would help ensure nuclear nonproliferation.

But there is no doubt that the exceptional treatment of India will amplify the paradoxes of the NPT regimen. North Korea and Iran might seek the same treatment as India in the future. Antinuclear nongovernmental organizations have expressed concern that the NPT regime might collapse. A New Komeito lawmaker has raised a question about allowing an exception to the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

A prime ministerial aide noted: "The five major nuclear powers (United States, Britain, France, Russia and China) have said 'yes.' It is meaningless for Japan to say 'no.'" Japan is likely to present some conditions, such as not providing uranium-enrichment technology and information that can be used for military purposes, while continuing urging India to join the NPT.

International community

The international community is split over the exceptional treatment of India. The NSG failed to reach a conclusion in its Aug. 21-22 meeting. The group will aim at a unanimous decision in the next session in September.

The members are roughly categorized into three groups: proactive, cautious, and tolerant. The proactive group includes the United States, France, Russia, and Britain that are allowed to possess nuclear weapons under the NPT regime. These countries have effectively endorsed India's possession of nuclear weapons. Although China has not clarified where it stands, the country is not against applying special treatment.

The cautious group includes New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, and Scandinavian countries that are actively advocating nuclear disarmament and are against nuclear weapons programs.

Canada, Australia, and Japan are among those countries that tolerate the situation. They place high priority on relations with the United States, while pursuing the goals of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

NSG discussions are conducted behind closed doors, but according to a diplomatic source, over 50 opinions and revision requests came from some 20 countries of the 45 countries that attended the previous session. The source described the situation as a far cry from reaching a consensus. In the meeting, the United States proposed the unconditional lifting of embargo. Meanwhile, the cautious group sought the inclusion of the provisions that are designed to: (1) stop treating India as an exception in the event the country conducts another nuclear test; (2) review the arrangement regularly; and (3) restrict the exports of uranium-enrichment and reprocessing technologies.

High-ranking officials from the United States and India discussed a

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response on the weekend that followed the NSG meeting. India, which has promised a continued voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests,

insisted that it cannot accept additional conditions. The United States is scheduled to present a revised plan for the next meeting. Whether the plan can convince the cautious countries is a delicate question.

(3) Fear that Agriculture Minister Ota's office-expense issue may deal fatal blow to Fukuda cabinet

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 3) (Slightly abridged)
August 27, 2008

It was discovered on Aug. 26 that a political organization of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota in its annual political funding reports had declared as office expenses the home of a secretary. Unless Ota fulfills his responsibility as a politician and gives a full explanation, he may be pressed to resign, a move that would inflict a mortal wound on the Fukuda cabinet. The opposition camp plans to question Fukuda's accountability for appointing Ota as farm minister.

Asked by reporters last night, Fukuda said: "Ota should give a thorough explanation as a politician. That's all I can say."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said: "I'm not in a situation to make any comment" on Ota's next course of action. This is the dominant view in the government and ruling coalition.

However, many government and ruling coalition members, mainly from the New Komeito, have said that Ota's explanation is insufficient, with New Komeito leader Akihiro Ota saying: "He needs to explain the details of the issue." The New Komeito has begun distancing itself from Fukuda.

Fukuda has asked his cabinet members to strictly manage their political funds since soon after taking office so as not to follow the footsteps of the former Abe administration, which collapsed due to a series of money-related scandals involving cabinet members.

At the time of inauguration of the Fukuda cabinet, the Political Funds Control Law did not require lawmakers' fund management organizations to attach to their fund reports receipts for expenditures of less than 50,000 yen for office, utilities, and miscellaneous expenses. However, since the law was revised last year, receipts for expenditures of more than one yen, excluding labor costs, will be made public from January 2009.

Fukuda appears to be overcoming this crisis by letting Ota disclose receipts based on the present law.

However, since Ota has yet to clarify when he will disclose them, no prospects for settling the issue are in sight for now.

Opposition aims at using money-related issue to attack ruling camp

The opposition camp now has a golden opportunity to attack Fukuda prior to the upcoming extra session, which is viewed as a battleground to force the Prime Minister to dissolve the Lower House.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama

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stressed: "I think Ota has no choice but to quit his post before the extra session. If he does not resign, we will thoroughly pursue him in the Diet." Tadayoshi Ichida, head of the secretariat of the Japanese Communist Party, made this comment: "The Prime Minister's responsibility for appointing a person who is not suitable to serve as a cabinet minister is serious."

Ota recently made a controversial remark: "Consumers are noisy." At the time when the opposition was trying to come up with a strategy of attacking Fukuda's policy of placing importance on consumers in the extra session, the money-related issue cropped up.

It is safe to say that if Ota quits his post, the Fukuda government will suffer a setback. If Ota does not resign, the opposition will

continue to attack Fukuda. One senior DPJ member said: "If Ota does not step down, it would be good for us. Because there will issues that we will be able to use to attack Fukuda."

(4) Agriculture Minister Ota may decide whether to resign this week over money scandal

SANKEI (Page 3) (Full)
August 28, 2008

Allegations of shady accounting of office expenses by Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota have arisen. Ota will explain later this week for what purpose his political support group used the 12 million yen reported as office expenses in 2005 and 2006. The government and the ruling camp have so far defended Ota, but they still remember that the downfall of the Abe administration was greatly attributed to a series of politics-and-money scandals involving cabinet ministers. Given this situation, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is expected to decide the fate of Ota while carefully watching public reaction to his explanation. Meanwhile, the opposition side is poised to attack the government on the latest scandal.

Asked by a reporter last night about whether he had been aware of Ota's office-expense trouble before he shuffled his cabinet on Aug. 1, Fukuda replied: "I didn't know about it. Politicians must be careful about how they behave. Since the Agriculture Minister has said he will give an explanation, I would like to wait for it." Fukuda added that if he had learned of Ota's involvement in such an issue, he would not have awarded him a cabinet post.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura also said in a press conference yesterday: "I wonder how accurate was the report about fictitious (office expenses)." But he added: "I expect him to give a convincing explanation based on reliable data."

"There is a particular reason why the Kantei (the Prime Minister's Office) is unable to easily say that Mr. Ota is innocent," a Kantei source said. It is because former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had initially defended Toshiaki Matsuoka and Norihiko Akagi, both of whom assumed the post of agriculture minister in succession, when office expense scandals involving them emerged. But Matsuoka committed suicide and Akagi was forced to quit in the end. This "shock" has yet to fade away. However, a senior government official said: "Ota's political organization registered the home of his secretary as its office, and this is a serious problem."

For the Kantei, "the Ota shock" seems to be so big that it

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immediately ordered the Cabinet Information Research Office to check other cabinet ministers to see if there were no hidden money scandals.

Ota has been under heavy fire from the opposition bloc for his controversial remark that consumers are "noisy," as well. A source in the Liberal Democratic Party said: "The Prime Minister is expected to determine Mr. Ota's future course by taking into consideration the public's and media reactions to Ota's explanation."

Meanwhile, Ota, showing confidence, has said that he would like to hold a briefing on Sept. 2.

24.8 million yen also reported in 2000-2002

It has been found that Ota's political organization also logged a total of about 24.8 million yen as office expenses from 2000 through 2002. The group registered the home of Ota's secretary as its office. The total amount of reported office expenses for the five years, with this total amount added to those in 2005 and 2006, reaches 48.2 million yen.

The organization declared 12.82 million yen for 2000, 8.92 million yen for 2001, and 3.09 million yen for 2002 as office expenses in its political fund report. Of those, it reported 4.96 million yen,

3.29 million yen, and 1.22 million yen in office-operation costs for 2000, 2001, and 2002, respectively.

According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Electoral Management Committee, jurisdiction over the political group was shifted from the Internal Affairs Ministry to the said Tokyo committee in 1995. At that time, its registered address was Shibuya Ward, but the address was changed to the current one in 2000. When Ota lost his Lower House seat in 2003, the address was changed to Roppongi, Minato Ward. Since he regained a Lower House seat in the 2005 general election, however, the organization has registered his secretary's home as its address, again.

(5) U.S., Europe at odds with Russia over Georgia: Japan having difficulty deciding what approach to take as host nation at upcoming G-8 foreign ministerial -- take hard line or attach importance to dialogue?

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
August 28, 2008

The confrontation between the U.S. and Europe on one side and Russia on the other is now beginning to force Japan to weave through a difficult course as it steers its diplomacy. The Group of Eight nations (G-8) holds a foreign ministerial every year, coinciding with the UN General Assembly held in late September. Japan, which will chair the ministerial this year, must lead discussions of such issues as the Georgia situation. Now that a number of key Russian government officials are expected to visit Japan later this year, how Japan will demonstrate its diplomatic capability, while taking the power balance among the U.S., Europe and Russia into account, will soon be tested. .

Georgia issue to top the agenda

Japan is now sounding out participating countries about a plan to

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hold the foreign ministerial around September 27. One senior Foreign Ministry official said: "The Georgia issue is a hot topic. We cannot help but bring it up."

Japan has gone along with the U.S. and Europe in demanding that Russia should ensure Georgia's integrity as a nation. Foreign Minister Koumura issued this statement denouncing Russia in early hours of August 27, the day after Russian President Medvedev signed a presidential order approving the independence of the Republic of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia.

Japan's position is delicate. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on the afternoon of the 27th met with British Ambassador to Japan Warren and exchanged views on the situation in Georgia. Fukuda agreed on the importance of maintaining the solidarity of the Group of Seven (G-7) nations. However, he reportedly indicated a skeptical stance toward dealing with Russia solely with a bullish approach.

Some G-7 members take the stand that it is necessary for the G-7 to discuss the Georgia issue without the participation of Russia, as one European diplomatic source said. If such an opinion gains ground among the G-7 nations, Japan will likely be pressed to undertake coordination, including the propriety of holding a G-8 foreign ministerial in September.

Russia may try to make approach to Russia

In the meantime, there is a possibility that as the confrontation between the U.S. and Russia deepens, Russia will step up its diplomatic approach to Japan. Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin on the 20th met with Japanese Ambassador to Russia Yasuo Saito at the Russian Foreign Minister. Karasin during the meeting urged that Japan as the host nation of the G-8 should take an objective and balanced approach.

Coordination is now underway with the possibility of Industry and Trade Minister Khristenko visiting Japan in September and Foreign Minister Lavrov in October. Premier Putin and Deputy Premier Ivanov

are also expected to come to Japan before the end of the year. Some take the view that Russia may try to strengthen its involvement in Asia, sending some positive message regarding economic cooperation and the Northern Territories issue on those occasions, as one source familiar with Japan-Russia relations predicted.

(6) Japan, South Korea staking claim to Takeshima islets based on different grounds

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
August 27, 2008

South Korea has avoided responding to Japan's proposal for bringing the Takeshima islet (known as Dokdo by South Korea) issue before the International Court of Justice, based on the accomplished fact that it effectively controls the islets. It has insisted that there is no territorial issue.

However, it has nervously reacted to the descriptions of the islets in Japan's school curriculum guidelines. The reason is because for South Korea, the Takeshima islets issue is not just a territorial issue. The government links it to the historical issue.

The Takeshima issue has a long history. South Korea's announcement

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of a plan to construct port facilities there in February 1996 has given rise to the present strain between the two countries. Then Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda protested to South Korea, noting, "The Takeshima islets are the integral part of Japan in terms of both history and international law." Then President Kim Yong Sam rebutted, using the word "absurd" -- often used by South Korea when criticizing Japanese politicians' historical views.

Japan apologized for its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula in the 1995 statement issued by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama. But historical views have continued to be political and diplomatic issues between Japan and Asian countries since the end of the Cold War. The Takeshima issue has been particularly in the spotlight between Japan and South Korea. Japan has insisted in official statements that it had established sovereignty over the islets by the middle of the 17th century. South Korea has responded that it had established sovereignty over the islets in the early 6th century (era of the Silla Kingdom). However, it now attaches importance (to former President Roh Moo Hyun's special statement on the so-called seizure of Takeshima), which notes that Japan first took the islets (by force) in the process of its invasion of the Korean Peninsula in 1905. It characterizes the incident as the start of the move that led to Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910.

This is why there is a divergence in the views of the two countries regarding Japan's call for settling the territorial issue through international mediation. A contributing factor was the priority that Japan gave to settling the compensation issue when signing the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (1965) that placed on the backburner any compromise between the two countries on historical views of Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

Although bilateral relations became strained in 1996, South Korea took a flexible stance when signing the Japan-South Korea Fisheries Agreement in 1999, putting the Takeshima territorial dispute on the backburner. Bilateral relations again became strained in 2004 when South Korea issued a Dokdo stamp, and in 2005 when Shimane Prefecture issued an ordinance celebrating Takeshima Island Day. However, in 2006 the two countries jointly conducted a radiological investigation near the islets.

A pattern of strains, followed by efforts to ease them, has repeatedly occurred over the Takeshima issue. Japan and South Korea again are not being pressed to use their resourcefulness. The current foreign affairs and trade minister, Yu Myung Hwan, is the official who brought about the joint investigation in 2006 when he was first vice minister.

(7) SDF dispatches (Part 4): Revising Article 9-LDP overconfident in

two-thirds' majority, backs down

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Abridged)
August 22, 2008

In October 2005, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party released its draft of a new constitution for the first time, building on the momentum of the LDP and its coalition partner, the New Komeito, garnering a majority of over two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives in its election held over the issue of privatizing state-run postal services. The LDP-drafted constitution amends Article 9's second paragraph and allows Japan to send the

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Self-Defense Forces overseas for international cooperation.

Whenever there was a need or call to send the Self-Defense Forces for overseas activities, the government was always drawn into a 'theological' argument over the constitutional interpretation or with the making of a law for special measures to do so. But if the Constitution's Article 9 were changed, the government would not have to go through such difficult procedures. Amendments to the Constitution, however, "shall be initiated by the Diet, through a concurring vote of two-thirds or more of all the members of each House." The LDP, thinking a good chance had come, made advances to the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) and its coalition partner, the New Komeito, in an aim to ensure two-thirds in the opposition-dominated House of Councillors, avoiding reactionary wording in its draft of a new constitution.

However, the three parties' cooperation, arranged through the LDP's advocates of constitutional revision, fell through due to what then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said. "We will of course make an appeal on constitutional revision in our campaign for the House of Councillors election," Abe said. The LDP tried to accentuate Abe's imprint so much that it was taken as a declaration of war in that constitutional revision would be made a campaign issue. The DPJ and the New Komeito chose to stress their differences with the LDP.

Last year, the LDP's Abe administration steamrolled a bill to create a national referendum law that stipulates procedures for constitutional revision, something that had not been carried out in the postwar 60 years, in trying to make actual results for the House of Councillors election. The DPJ, which at one time was poised to vote for the national referendum bill, reacted against that move. "We will not respond to talks for amendments to the Constitution as long as the Abe administration is in office," a DPJ executive said. Although the bill was enacted into law, the momentum for constitutional revision faded.

The national referendum law is set to be enforced in 2010. Until then, the Diet can neither initiate constitutional revision nor deliberate on it. The three years before the law could take effect is for the nation to deepen debate on such issues as revising Article 9. One year has already passed. However, the lower and upper chambers' constitutional panels are still unable even to select members. Each political party, believing that a general election is coming soon, is trying to avoid talking about constitutional revision. "We can't get votes for that," an LDP defense policy clique lawmaker said.

With the ruling coalition's majority of two-thirds in the House of Representatives, constitutional revision loomed near at hand. However, the LDP was poised to take second votes in the Diet's lower chamber to override decisions by the upper chamber using the ruling coalition's two-thirds majority. Such a Diet tactic made the opposition parties turn against the LDP. As a result, the momentum for constitutional revision vanished. The ruling coalition is again running about in confusion over how to deal with Diet affairs relating to the SDF's overseas dispatch. The ruling bloc put too much faith in its two-thirds majority and failed to form a steady consensus with the opposition camp. This will heavily lie on politics as a whole.

(8) SDF dispatch (Part 5): Public trust a must, Ishiba says

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
August 23, 2008

The ruling and opposition parties have been bogged down in their debate over the advisability of sending the Self-Defense Forces for overseas activities as needed. The Mainichi Shimbun interviewed former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who was responsible for enacting the new Antiterrorism Special Measures Law.

-- What if the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean stop?

Ishiba: The international community would think again that Japan is a country that cares only about itself. Japan has been leaving dangerous activities to other countries. Japan's supply of free oil can be a message meaning that Japan is playing a financial role. Japan is not the only country that is in trouble with the rising oil prices. Some people say that the oil should be used in Japan, but I feel something uncomfortable with that argument. There is something unrealistic about the idea of tasking the MSDF with escorting (Japanese) tankers there in the Indian Ocean. But it's possible to create a new law for the MSDF to patrol sea areas that are likely infested with pirates.

-- Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa talked about a grand coalition of the LDP and the DPJ. The two bargained over permanent legislation for Japan to send the SDF as needed (instead of creating a special measures law). In this grand coalition initiative, this permanent legislation was exploited for the political situation.

Ishiba: I don't think so. Mr. Ozawa is a man who has been thinking about what we should do for the world. The prime minister is also not a man who thinks Japan can care only about itself. However, Mr. Ozawa thinks the United Nations is an absolute entity, so I guess his argument was hard to overcome. One of the general (permanent) law's features is the requirement of the Diet's prior approval (for the government's SDF dispatch masterplan). The government makes selections from a menu of SDF activities, and the Diet decides what to do. I wonder why this is not good.

-- What do you think about the former Abe administration's attempt to change the government's interpretation of the Constitution's Article 9?

Ishiba: His argument sounds very legitimate. We must reinterpret the Constitution, or we are not allowed to shoot down a missile if that is flying over to the United States. Another issue is whether SDF members on an overseas mission should be allowed to fight back to defend foreign troops if and when they came under attack. This matter has nothing to do with the right to collective self-defense, so it might be better to do this issue first. I'm in favor of the right to collective self-defense. But things have their own order. This is a big issue. To get this job done, we need political stability and public trust in the government. Otherwise, we would fail to do so.

-- The Diet has also stopped its discussion of the Constitution. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tried to make it a campaign issue, but his attempt seems to have gone against him (with the LDP's rout in the House of Councillors election).

Ishiba: It was so soon. Some people (in the LDP) jumped the gun. There are many things like the healthcare and pension issues. But whatever issue we may address, we'll have to recover public trust in the government. We'll also have to go on with our discussion of security issues. We will need to make steady preparations and pull together. We must be ready for the opportunity that we will have once in several years.

